

SIBLING RIVALRY

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What causes sibling rivalry?

Caused, in part, by the feeling that someone is getting something you're not getting (whether you really want it or not).



How can we get this *to not matter*? Can we help kids to recognize when they already have what they need and want? How can we facilitate their being happy for the other person?

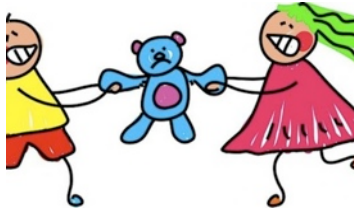
Problems:

- ☑ Sibling rivalry is taken as being “normal”—as in, to be expected—therefore many parents don’t step in. Furthermore, it’s supported by the popular advice to “let kids handle it themselves.” *But what if they can’t?* Adults often over-estimate the level of skill that young children have for resolving conflicts with their siblings.
- ☑ Separating the kids and time outs are short term solutions that offer no learning or skill-building. In addition, kids usually wind up feeling resentful toward the sibling who was more responsible for the problem yet received the same consequence as they did.
- ☑ Giving excuses for younger children when they need to be corrected. Using the excuse that “They don’t know any better” is a disservice to everyone. They *could* know better.

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- ☑ It doesn't help to talk about how much they'll need each other when they're older.
- ☑ There is a lot of torment that goes on and we cannot be complacent. Some of it is very well masked.



Strategies:

- ☑ Get in there and help by becoming part of the conversation. **Helping your kids doesn't have to mean taking over.** Get down on the floor and listen before diving in to mediate.
- ☑ Make sure they're not using fighting as a way to get your attention.
- ☑ What are they fighting *for*? To be tougher, smarter, cooler -- anything to be superior? Why has it become so important in this family?
- ☑ Find opportunities anywhere and anytime to build up your child's awareness of others' feelings as well as their ability to demonstrate genuine empathy.
- ☑ If one or both of your kids are not taking your efforts to reduce their fighting seriously, you may to impose consequences. The purpose of consequences is simply to weigh the odds in favor of your child deciding to handle things differently next time, i.e., it serves as a disincentive. It should never be punitive in nature, i.e., just to punish. Examples include doing a chore for the offended sibling, or even spending ten minutes helping you with some household chore since you had to stop what you were doing to address the conflict.

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☑ Don't be afraid to share with them your observations about their temperaments. It's important though to always do so kindly. It also helps to "normalize" whatever you are describing about their temperament.

☑ Set your kids up to succeed by establishing routines for those times in the day when conflict often occurs, e.g., right after school and the issue of who gets the computer, car rides and who sits where, and so on.

Other discussion points:

- Dealing with saying you're sorry.
- How much to accommodate personality/temperament?
- Modeling a respect for differences in one another, e.g., preferred levels of affection.
- *Fair* isn't necessarily the same as *equal* (*Noah got to do XYZ so why can't I ...?*).
- Fostering good sibling relationships.



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